

AMERICAN JEWS

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In order to be able to discuss the **History of the American Jews**, no matter how concise it is to be, we must go back to Spain for the background which drove the Hispanic Jews to the New World.

The Jews of Spain lived on the Iberian Peninsula many years before the birth of Christianity. Many were descendants of Royal (Ibn Daud, Abarbanel, Nasi) and noble Judean families. They lived harmoniously with the native population, enjoyed mutual friendship and respect. With the ascent of Christianity, anti-Jewish laws were enacted and from 589 A.D. they became harsh and brutal. In 711 the Moslems invaded Andalusia and eventually much of Spain. It was then that the literary and religious renaissance took place and Spain took over the supremacy of Jewish learning and religion. For the hereto 700 years, Babylonia (Iraq) had held this honor; now it was Spain's turn to issue forth laws and decrees regarding the Jewish religious life. They also invented the vowel signs and punctuation system to facilitate Hebrew reading, which is bereft of vowels. The birth of Hebraic poetry took place, as well as cantorial music. Renowned poets, liturgists, philosophers, men of science of many phases and religious sages flourished for the next 700 years in Spain under the benevolent rule of the Moslems.

For a while even the Jews of the Northern (Christian) provinces were not molested, but there was constant pressure from Rome to the effect that Jews must be persecuted or converted. Any of the nobles who showed partiality toward the Jews were in great disfavor. With each succeeding year Rome enacted new disabilities upon the Jews with every form of terror as was repeated in our century by the Nazis. Massacres by inflamed mobs became frequent. On March 15, 1391, the Inquisition was established on a permanent basis. Massacre of Jews was intensified, 30,000 were slain in Seville. On June 20th the Jews of Cordoba and Toledo were wiped out; on July 9 5,000 were slain in Valencia; on August first the entire community of Palma (Majorca) was wiped out. That was but the beginning.

Vincent Ferrer, a man sanctified for his burning fanaticism, set out with determination either to convert the Jews or have them slain. Thus, with a cross in one hand and the Jewish Torah in the other, with a "terrible voice" and escorted by spearmen and flagellants, he inflamed the populace against the Jews. Flight was prohibited and made impossible. Many Jews found conversion as his only means to escape great suffering. During his reign of terror many Spanish communities became Christian and their synagogues were converted into churches (Dec. 1412 - March 1413). In Aragon alone his efforts netted him 20,500 conversions. This act and ensuing years of shameless terror created Marranos, people who outwardly practiced Christianity but inwardly remained Jews. And it was the Marranos who suffered most in the hands of the Inquisition. Informers and snoopers were constantly at work and so were the flames of the Auto Da Fe.

After the fall of Granada (Nov. 25, 1491), the last Moslem kingdom was driven from Spain, and along with it, freedom and learning. To make Spain a truly Holy country the driving out of the Jews was the next goal. On March 31, 1492, King Fernando and Isabella issued the edict of the banishment of the Jews from all Spanish territories and to be out within four months or be put to death. A third of the population of the Spain of then, left the land where they had lived since before the birth of Jesus. Horrors of banishment followed them. Most of them found re-

fuge in the Moslem countries, particularly Turkey, others came to Italy and eventually to Holland and England. This expulsion coincided with the discovery of America by Columbus.

Nearly the entire episode of the discovery of the New World was done either by or through Marranos. If the Spaniards should succeed in proving Columbus Spanish, it would have to be based on the fact that he was a Marrano, and that was already proven. His association in Spain was nearly exclusively with Marranos. The prominent Santangel clan were all Marranos. It was to Louis Santangel that Columbus first revealed his plans for the epoch-making voyage and it was to him that Columbus announced the discovery of America. It was also the same Santangel who procured the loan to the Royal Pair which furnished the voyage. Other Marrano patrons of Columbus were the Gabriel Sanchez and Alfonso de la Caballeria families.

Futhermore, in 1898, the historian Don Celso Garcia de la Riega found documents in Pontevedra, a town in the North-Spanish province of Galicia, the names of the father, brother and sister of Columbus (Domingo, Bartolome and Blanca Colon) and his mother, Susana Fonterosa. A member of the Colon family was burned by the inquisition in Terragona 1489 for Judaizing. The family fled to Italy and settled near Genoa. The Colombo in Genoa is not of the same Colon family. Columbus couldn't speak Italian and did not write in that language. He spoke the Galician dialect. His ships were all named after locations around Pontevedra (including the Santa Maria, which was originally called La Gallega—Galicia). His patron in the court of the Royal family was Diego de Deza, a Pontevedrin bishop of Jewish extraction. All of these points make Columbus a "Galitzianer" from Spain. The second trip of Columbus was covered entirely by the money converted from Jewish religious properties confiscated by the Royal pair.

The personnel which sailed with Columbus were also practically all Marranos, some who were even reconciled by the Inquisition for Judaizing as was Mestre Barnal, the boat's physician. Their interpreter-to-be with the Hindus was Luis de Torres, converted before sailing. Alonso de la Calle, Rodrigo Sanchez, the physician Marco were other noted Marranos aboard the ship. It was a Marrano who first set foot on the earth of the New World. Known non-converted Jews were Abraham Zacuto the astronomer, "map-Jew" Ribes and Abraham Senior.

It was no wonder that soon after the discovery of the New World the bloody inquisition was established in Mexico to ferret out the Marranos. The Marranos arrived in Mexico with the first Conquistadores hoping to escape the hounding of the Inquisition. They were present in every Mexican city. In 1537 Marranos were prohibited to immigrate to the New World. In 1571 the Inquisitional Tribunal was established. The first Auto Da Fe was celebrated on Feb. 28, 1574. Many Autos followed in quick succession. The most spectacular one took place on April 11, 1649 when thousands upon thousands came to witness the burning of 13 in person and 57 in effigy. The last Auto in Mexico took place in 1788 and finally abolished entirely in 1820. The Inquisitional headquarters were in the monastery of San Diego in Mexico City, still standing.

Whenever Marranos reached tolerant countries they immediately cast off their Christianity and returned to Judaism. Such were most of the Jews who settled in Holland and its colonies (Brazil and the West Indies). When the Dutch lost Brazil, the Jews fled. There were 23 of these Brazilian-Dutch Jews who arrived in New Amsterdam (New York) at the end of July in 1654. They had no money to pay their passage, therefore, their belongings which

they carried to start their new life in a new country were sold by the sea captain. Since this was still insufficient to cover the debt, three of the men in the party were jailed for three weeks.

Peter Stuyvesant, the Governor of New Netherland, did not relish the presence of the Jews and wrote to Holland asking to prohibit their settling in New Amsterdam, the orders from overseas were that the Jews should not be molested.

Jacob Barsimon and Asser Levy became the moving spirits of the New Netheland's Jewish community. They slowly won for the Jews many privileges. On Nov. 1655 they gained the privilege of acting as guards against Indian forays. On April 21, 1657, the Jews won their right to citizenship. However, the privilege of building a synagogue was not granted as houses for worship were for Christians only. Nevertheless, the Jews met in a cottage where they conducted their services. Saul Brown Prado and Haim de Lucena acted as the first officers of the new congregation. The first Jewish cemetery was established in the present Chatham Square of New York in 1656.

Other first Jewish (all were Sefardic; Spanish-Portuguese and ex-Marrano) settlements were in Three Rivers, Quebec; in Philadelphia; in Montreal, Quebec; and in Providence, Rhode Island. The Montreal Sefardic congregation was established in 1768. The most noted family was the Lazarus David and their descendants, whose oldest son, David David, established the Bank of Montreal. In the Anglo-French War, Aaron Hart, Emanuel de Cordova, Hannaniel Garcia and Isaac Miranda distinguished themselves. Levy Solomons, of Montreal, and Hyam Salomon, of Philadelphia, supplied the Revolutionary army. Rabbi Gershon Mendes Seixas, a native of New York and Rabbi of the Sefardic congregation "Shearit Israel", participated in the inauguration of President Washington in 1789.

The State of Maryland was the last one to grant equal rights for the Jews, but finally on Feb. 26, 1825, it too, adopted an act "for the relief of Jews of Maryland."

One of the most colorful figures of these early Sefardic Jews was Mordecai Emanuel Noah (born in Philadelphia 1785, died in New York 1851). He was an American Consul to Tunisia, an author, playwright surveyor of the port of New York, and held other political positions. During his travels in Europe while in capacity of a consul, he beheld the suffering of the fellow Jews. Upon returning to the United States, he conceived the idea of creating an independent Jewish republic on Grand Island in the Niagara River between Niagara Falls and Buffalo, N. Y. (1825), wherein the oppressed European Jews could settle. The name of this Jewish State was to have been "Arrarat". A corner stone was dedicated in Buffalo with much pomp and ado (the island was not accessible then) but this Noah boat never reached Arrarat and the corner stone is in the Buffalo Museum.

Others of note of Sefardic Stock in the early American and American-Jewish history were Judah Tuoro, native of Newport, R. I., who was the hero of the war of 1812 and died in New Orleans in 1854; in the unpopular war of aggression against Mexico, Major David de Leon, a Jew from South Carolina, became the hero of Chapultepec. Lt. Col. Israel Moses likewise served with distinction. Rebecca Gratz (Philadelphia 1781-1869), whose beauty inspired Walter Scott to create Rebecca in his "Ivanhoe", founded the first American-Jewish parochial school in Philadelphia (1835), and the Jewish foster home of that city. The hymns of the poetess Penina Moise (Charleston 1798-1880) have been incorporated in the American-Jewish prayers. Foremost of the Sefardic women poetesses was Emma Lazarus (N. Y. 1849-1887). From one of her poems,

"The Colossus", which she wrote on the occasion of the arrival of Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty, the following excerpt was inscribed upon the Statue: "... Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

In the early part of the nineteenth century, the German Jews began to arrive in Canada and United States. The first Ashkenazic (non-Sefardic) congregation in Canada was formed in Toronto in 1845. A few Ashkenazic congregations existed in the United States at a somewhat earlier date. In 1848 when political upheavals took place in Germany, a great number of German Jews arrived in both countries. These Jews settled in all the large cities with the main concentration in Cincinnati.

The Sefardic communities, never very numerous, were soon outnumbered. The Sefardim were full-fledged Americans, well-to-do and aristocratic. Tho they provided the German Jews with employment and succor, socially the Sefardim did not accept the German Jews for several decades. But soon the German Jews achieved a place of distinction and this "cast" barrier was soon dissolved.

The German Jews brought along with them the Jewish Reformation. Even though one Reform Temple existed in Charleston, S. C., as early as 1824, American Jewish Reformation, as is known today, started with the arrival in 1846 of Dr. Isaac Mayer Wise.

Dr. Wise obtained a position with a congregation in Albany, N. Y., and soon set out to introduce reforms. The orthodox congregation considered some of his innovations pure heresy and was forced to give up his post. In 1854 Dr. Wise accepted a position with the congregations Bene Yeshurun of Cincinnati. That city boasted an almost purely German-Jewish settlement and Dr. Wise was able not only to pursue his reformation but also establish the "Hebrew Union College" in Cincinnati, which is now world famous and where a uniform rite for Reform Judaism is taught to future reform ministers. The Union College now supplies ministers for the United States, Canada, England and other countries where the Reform Temple exists. It owns a large campus, many buildings and an important Judaica-Hebraica research library of some 60,000 volumes and many valuable manuscripts. After a stormy but colorful career Dr. Wise died on March 26, 1900.

By the outbreak of the war between the States, there were 150,000 Jews in the country. The sympathies of some were with the South and slavery. Foremost among these was Judah Philip Benjamin, considered the "Brains of the Confederacy", and right-hand man of President Jefferson Davis, while Captain Levy M. Harby was in command of the Galveston harbor.

However, since most Jews lived in the northern cities and had no need for slaves, and also due to their inherent humanitarianism, they allied themselves strongly with the northern cause. Due to his anti-slavery preaching, Dr. David Einhorn was compelled to leave Baltimore. Other outspoken anti-slave propagandists were Rabbi Sabato Morais of Philadelphia and Liebman Adler of Chicago. In large numbers Jews enrolled on the Union side. Some of these distinguished themselves: Col. Leopold Blumenberg at Antietam; Brig-Gen. Philip Joachimsen; Maj-Gen. Frederick Knefler; Uriah Phillips Levy, who abolished corporal punishment in the Navy, and others.

Besides the Reformation, the German Jews created many fraternal orders, the best known of which, due to its charitability and wide-spread activity, is the "B'nai B'rith" (Sons of the Covenant) organization. Its activities are numerous and praiseworthy, and their publications are of influence. Among the institutions founded by the B'nai B'rith are many orphanages in American cities; homes for